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Viewing cable 08ATHENS1216, TFGG01: GREECE'S BUSINESS-AS-USUAL WITH RUSSIA

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08ATHENS1216	2008-08-28 17:51	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Athens

Appears in these articles:

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 001216

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/28/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#) [GR](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: TFGG01: GREECE'S BUSINESS-AS-USUAL WITH RUSSIA
UNDERMINES STRONG NATO STATEMENTS

REF: A. ATHENS 1188
 1B. ATHENS 1183
 1C. 07 ATHENS 2375
 1D. SECSTATE 91894

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES DEBORAH MCCARTHY. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Despite strong statements at NATO and the EU by FM Bakoyannis supporting Georgian territorial integrity and condemning Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, the GOG at the same time is moving ahead with several "business-as-usual" events with Russia, including a visit this week of a Russian defense industry team to discuss arms purchases, the impending Parliamentary ratification of the South Stream gas pipeline deal with Russia, and co-sponsorship with Russia of a major cultural event marking 180 years of Greek-Russian diplomatic relations. Embassy will continue to press the GOG to delay or cancel these events to avoid undercutting NATO and EU positions. END SUMMARY.

GREECE'S EVOLVING POSITION

12. (C) The Georgia/Russia crisis has put Athens in a tight spot due to its historically close ties to both countries. Wary of alienating Moscow but spooked by Russian actions and the international community's tough response, the GOG at first tried to remain silent on the crisis (indeed, Prime Minister Karamanlis has still made no public statements on

the situation). Once an EU position began to take shape, Greece placed itself squarely behind France. At this writing, the Greek position appears to be further evolving into one in which they try, under the guise of playing the role of a "bridge" between East and West, to take positions on both sides of the issue, making tough political statements at NATO and elsewhere on Georgia's territorial integrity, while moving forward with "business-as-usual" on Russian pipeline, arms deals, and cultural events.

¶3. (C) At the special EU Foreign Ministers' meeting and the NATO Ministerial, FM Bakoyannis came out for the territorial integrity of Georgia and the need for the withdrawal of Russian troops to their pre-crisis positions. She pledged two Greek monitors to the initial OSCE mission (the maximum 10 percent allowed by OSCE rules of the 20 total monitors), and we were told the GOG would be willing to send the maximum of ten to the planned expanded 100-monitor mission. Perhaps most significantly, Bakoyannis made a statement following Russian recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states in which she expressed "regret" for Russia's step and joined the French Presidency in "condemning" the Russian decision. She was strongly criticized in the Greek press by a "Russian diplomat" (in fact, Russian Ambassador to Greece Vdovin) for using the word "condemn," which Vdovin noted Greece had not used in the case of Kosovo's declaration of independence.

¶4. (SBU) Greece also stepped forward early with humanitarian assistance to Georgia. The GoG told A/EconCouns on August 21 that they have pledged 80,000 euro to the World Food Program to help procure necessary food aid. According to Hellenic Aid, the GoG was considering additional humanitarian aid, but no decisions had yet been made yet. As reported by Embassy Athens via unclass email to the Georgia Task Force on August 13, the GoG has already delivered one C-130 full of humanitarian supplies, including 10-person tents (3.5 tons), blankets (2.5-3 tons), and various medicines and medical supplies, and 100,000 euro directly to UNHCR for IDPs in South Ossetia.

DO ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS?

¶5. (C) The statements above notwithstanding, Greece is moving forward with several ill-advised moves that contradict, if not undermine, Greek expressions of support for Alliance positions:

-- Greece is currently hosting the visit of Russian technical advisors to discuss Greek purchase of 450 Russian-made armored personnel carriers (BMPs) -- part of the pipeline and arms deal signed by Putin and Karamanlis last December (ref C). Greek officials told us the Russian team would meet only with "private" Greek defense firms and there would be no official Greek participation. We believe, however, that the Russian team is likely to meet Greek MOD officials and that Greek officials will participate in the Russians' meetings with defense firms.

-- The Greek Parliament is moving forward (probably in the next week) with its previously scheduled ratification of the South Stream gas pipeline deal. On August 28, the Parliament Committee on Commerce and Production approved the ratification and sent it to the full Parliament. In a statement the same day before the Parliament Foreign and Defense Committee, FM Bakoyannis said Greece would "honor any commitments it rokered before the Georgia crisis," while Deveopment Minister Folias stressed to the Commerce and Production Committee the "geopolitical importance" of South Stream and Greece's role as a "bridge" linking Eastern producers and Western consumers.

-- On August 28, Russian Ambassador Vdovin gave a well-received press conference announcing that the "Moscow Virtuosi" msical tour of Europe would begin in Athens on September 5 at the Herodion theater next to the Acropolis. The event would take place under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Culture and the Greek Parliament and was designed to mark 180 years of diplomatic relations between Russia and Greece.

EMBASSY PUSHES BACK

¶6. (C) Embassy delivered ref D points on Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states to MFA Secretary General Agathocles and to MFA A5 Directorate for CIS Countries Counsellor Elisabeth Fotiadou. In addition, the Embassy has worked hard to convince the GOG not to continue "business-as-usual" with the Russians by moving forward with the BMP visit, the ratification of South Stream, and the cultural event. We raised the issue with PM diplomatic advisor Bitsios, MFA SecGen Agathocles, Bakoyannis advisor Haris Lalacos, the CIS Desk at the MFA, the Hellenic General Staff, the Ministry of Development, the Parliament leadership, and other Greek government agencies, as well as with numerous other diplomatic missions, including the British, French, Canadian, Polish, Finnish, Hungarian, Latvian, Ukrainian, Georgian, Slovenian, and Estonian missions. Our diplomatic colleagues all promised to report the information to their capitals.

17. (C) We have heard a generally uniform response from GOG officials. They argue that the Georgia/Russia crisis and such developments as the Parliament's impending ratification of the South Stream pipeline are "not connected in any way," and that the latter was scheduled well in advance and should be seen as "routine." We counter that these events are very closely connected, that "business-as-usual" at this point serves to legitimize Russia's actions, and that moving forward with these events contradicts, if not undermines, Greece's stated agreement with Alliance and EU positions.

18. (C) The South Stream ratification received Committee approval on August 28, but approval by the full Parliament has not yet taken place (we expect it very shortly). Thus, we may still have a window of opportunity to convince the Greeks to delay. We will continue to press them and to urge our diplomatic colleagues to do the same. We will also look for opportunities to urge PM Karamanlis to break his silence and to come out in favor of Alliance positions.

MCCARTHY